

# **Idealism**

The basis for anti-Realist theories

**1. Should human rights be a top priority of American foreign policy?**

**2. What do we mean by human rights, what types of rights?**

## **Answers by political perspectives:**

**Realists: NO!! Human rights concerns have no place in foreign policy, unless they happen to coincide with the national interest (which essentially means they are still secondary and used more for propaganda).**

**Idealists: Yes!! A prime goal of all politics is the improvement of the human condition. Human rights are one aspect of a good life.**

Does this make Realists war-mongers, insensitive, or inhumane?

They would say no, they just value security first and other goals or goods later.

**Background -- Some would say that realism emerged as a theory in response to idealism. Others say idealism is a response to realist tenets through history.**

**Like realism, the roots of idealism can be traced back for centuries in various forms.**

**We see strains of idealism in the teachings of Christ, Buddha, Muhammad, Mo Ti as well as other non-sectarian teachings.**

**•There are ancient, medieval, and modern versions of Idealism.**

**•The modern form comes in a few forms: pacifism, liberalism, globalism, and ironically the original writings of Marx and other anarchists.**

**•Marx was a humanist (but not pacifist), but actual communist leaders of 20<sup>th</sup> century were Realists and often very brutal dictators. This was a perversion of Marx's writings.**

# Forms of Idealism



War is Bad  
Morality Necessary  
People are Good  
Public Opinion  
Democracy



War Bad  
Harmony of Interests  
Universal Ethics  
People are Good  
Public Opinion



War bad overall  
Harmony of Interests  
Universal Ethics  
People are Good  
Communism



War irrational  
Harmony of Interests  
Universal Ethics  
Some Greed is Good  
Public Opinion  
Democracy  
Capitalism

**These are all Branches of Idealist Thought, although there are contradictions between them regarding some principles but also policy prescriptions But all are optimists!!!**

**A pacifist is someone that does not believe in violence as a way to settle disputes, or for any other reason for that matter.**

**A globalist is someone that prefers to think of one human race instead of many nations. There is only one nation to a true globalist. Many globalists believe that someday nation-states will disappear.**

**A liberal is someone that believes that democracy and capitalism are the best ways to unite people around the world.**

**•Idealism disagrees with realism, particularly that the pursuit of power and war is amoral.**

**•Idealism is more normative than realism.**

**•Realism attempts to explain how the world is while idealism emphasizes what it could be.**

**•idealism offers a normative prescription for the conduct of politics.**

**Many idealists blamed *realpolitik* for WWI.**

**In other words, when people think like realists conflict is more likely. Realism is a self-fulfilling prophecy.**

**Idealists would say that not enough was done to limit the anarchy of the international system.**

**The League of Nations was created to provide a firm basis for international law and collective security, a forum where differences could be resolved peacefully.**

# Main Tenets of Idealism

1. **Universal Ethics** -- All humans should abide by common standards such as natural laws. There is a universal ethic common to all people.

There is no special aspect of culture that makes morality different from country to country. This is an excuse on the part of dictators in the opinion of idealists. In other words, idealists claim *cultural relativists* are hypocrites.

- 2. Peace is better than war -- War is seen as immoral by idealists, by others is only as a last resort and for a just cause. St Thomas Aquinas.**
  
- 3. War is irrational – Breakdown of rationality according to idealists, whereas realists say it becomes rational because of anarchy.**

**While realists believe real conflicts arise over real disagreements, idealists tend to believe that such conflicts could be avoided if states sought to better understand each other.**

**Thus, there is much *misperception* and manipulation of people in international relations that needs to be reduced, according to idealists.**

**4. Harmony of interests -- Idealists believe it is possible for humans to live together in harmony if the proper measures are taken.**

**The human race could live together in peace if only we would come to believe that war and violence are not the answer. (globalist and humanists).**

**Conflict is not intrinsic of human existence as realists claim; war and violence are learned behaviors, not intrinsic. (constructivists)**

**Liberals believe the full implementation of democracy and capitalism could provide a harmony interests: wealth and the good life.**

**War disrupts economics; wars are destructive and not necessarily profitable, especially to most individuals in the world.**

**5. People are good: Idealists are more optimistic about human nature. In the proper setting, man would enjoy peace and be free from conflict.**

**6. The Power of Public Opinion: People that are active can take charge of politics. Political leaders can manipulate common people to fight in war, but an active, democrat movement of common people can reverse this manipulation.**

**Again, war is irrational and avoidable, and most individuals would not participate in war if they were fully informed and had a free choice.**

**International Law and organization -- Idealists put a lot of faith in international law and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) such as the United Nations and International Court of Justice to solve problems on the international level.**

**Prominent figures in this tradition include Hugo Grotius and Woodrow Wilson.**